

Dear Honorable Members of the State Legislature,

We are writing to express our strong support for the implementation of a Harm Reduction Health Center pilot program. While not testifying on behalf of the full council, in our time as Bangor City Councilors and as residents of our great Queen City, we have witnessed the devastating effects of the opioid epidemic in Maine and believe that a Harm Reduction Health Center pilot program can be an effective tool in reducing the deaths and overdoses associated with drug use. We believe that no one in our community should die from substance use and that we should explore options that keep our friends and family alive so they can find recovery.

The opioid epidemic has hit Maine extremely hard, with some of the highest rates of opioid overdose deaths in the country. In Penobscot County in 2022, 274 members of our community died from overdoses. As of March 31, we have already lost 76 people in 2023. Harm Reduction Health Center sites have been shown to be a successful harm reduction strategy in other parts of the country, and a pilot program would provide an opportunity to see if this approach could be effective in our state.

Harm Reduction Health Center sites are a [proven harm reduction strategy](#) that has been successful in reducing overdose deaths, preventing the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis C, and connecting people who use drugs to much-needed healthcare and social services. These sites provide a safe and sterile environment for individuals to use drugs under the supervision of trained medical professionals who can provide overdose prevention, lifesaving interventions, and referrals to much-needed addiction treatment and other support services.

In addition, Harm Reduction Health Center sites can help to reduce the negative impact of drug use on our communities, including public injection and discarded syringes, by providing a designated and monitored space for drug use. In a [study](#) published by the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 90% of people using a safe injection site reported that they would otherwise be injecting in a public restroom, street, park, or parking lot. In the City of Bangor, we have heard numerous concerns from residents, parents, and business owners who are finding used needles discarded in our public parks and other public spaces. Clean-up has proven challenging and costly, and we see Harm Reduction Health Centers as an important part of the effort to reduce the number of discarded syringes in our streets and parks and minimize the risk of accidental exposure to used needles.

Moreover, the pilot program would provide an opportunity for data collection and analysis to determine the effectiveness of this approach in Maine. The program would be closely monitored, and the results could be used to inform future policy decisions related to drug addiction and harm reduction.

We understand that there may be concerns about the legality and morality of Harm Reduction Health Center sites, but we believe that the evidence shows that they can be an effective and compassionate response to the opioid epidemic and drug addiction [without increasing public](#)

[nuisance crimes](#). Furthermore, implementing a Harm Reduction Health Center pilot program should not be viewed as a solution in isolation, but rather as a part of a comprehensive public health approach to drug addiction that includes prevention, treatment, and harm reduction.

In closing, we urge you to support the implementation of a Harm Reduction Health Center pilot program. By doing so, we can work together to save lives, reduce harm, and promote a healthier and more compassionate society. We submit our testimony today as individual city councilors and not on behalf of the Bangor City Council.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Clare Davitt, Cara Pelletier, and Gretchen Schaefer
Bangor City Councilors